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THE RELATION OF ART TO NATURE

by

John W. Beatty



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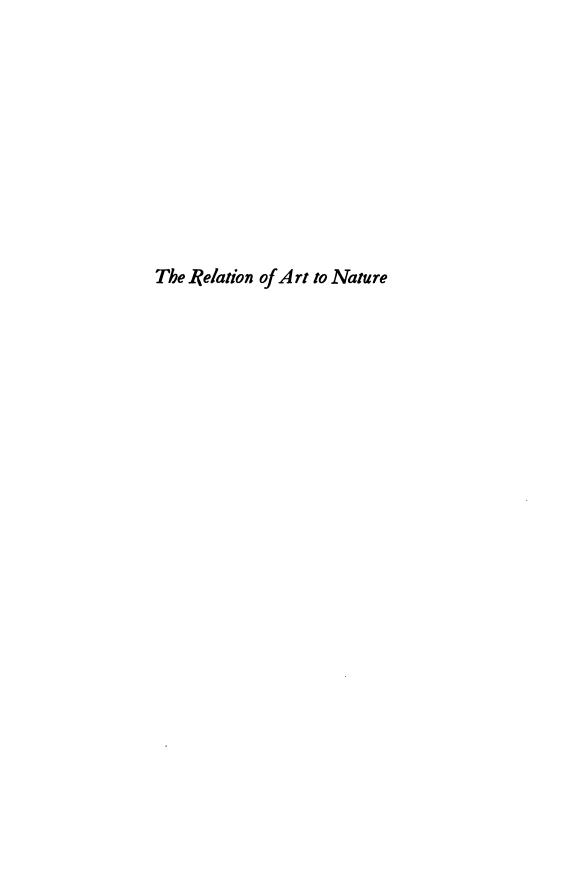
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ARTES SCIENTIA VERITAS

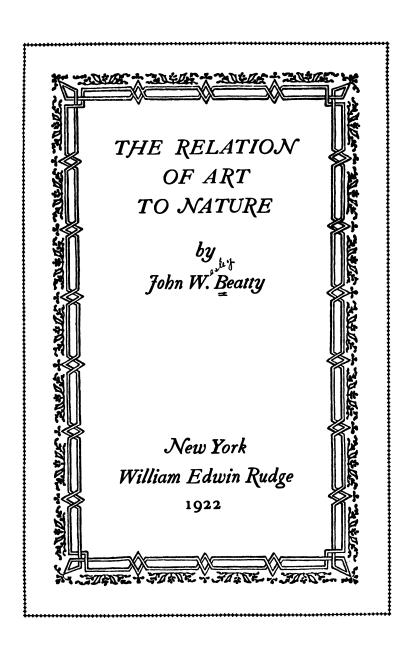


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To my gentle wife this little volume is affectionately dedicated.



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William Angus Knight 1836–1916

Lord James Bryce 1838–1922

Lafcadio Hearn 1850–1904

Maurice Maeterlinck 1862-

Sei-ichi Taki





In his very convincing and lucid treatise on the fundamental principles of art, John W. Beatty gives us a most absorbing theme to follow—the relation of art to nature, as expressed in their own words by artists themselves, of different times and creeds; with, too, the opinions of philosophers and men of letters.

Himself a well-known painter, Mr. Beatty has been for almost thirty years the enlightened Director of Fine Arts of the Carnegie Institute, where, alone in our whole country, are held annually International Exhibitions of Art. Much of his life has thus been spent in intimate association with the very best painters and sculptors of our generation, and his and their opinions and observations are here to be read with much pleasure and profit by every one interested in art.

Mr. Beatty is quite right when he says, "Not many able artists have recorded their opinions."

In conversation, or on the impulse of the moment they may often speak with great beauty and clarity of expression, but nearly always tersely and to the point. On the other hand, the man of letters is more given to analysis and finds more words, and more beautiful ones, to express his meaning.

Analysis is perhaps a dangerous thing for the craftsman to toy with. He must approach nature directly and simply, with concentration that is absolute. He dissects only that particular fragment of nature which is before him, and that unconsciously. The precious sensation of closeness to nature is so fleeting and so fickle, so often not there at all, and so frightened, that it is easily scared away by the cold voice of the man with a rule to follow. The ever changing aspect of nature, be it man or landscape, makes the first impression quickly recorded in the thumb-box sketch, or with a dozen lines on the back of an envelope, an invaluable document. Again and again in the painting of a picture we refer with respect to this first strong impression of nature.

The words character and beauty are many times repeated in this book. Both terms are definite and yet how elastic! Rembrandt is the preëminent example of the complex meaning of the word beauty; many of his models he found in the Ghetto and

among his friends and neighbors, or, for lack of a model, he painted himself. Surely he has proved to us that only that which has character is truly beautiful; and we must also feel in the presence of Rembrandt's works, his absolute fidelity to truth.

On a certain occasion I was in Rodin's studio when reference was made to some harsh criticism of one of his nudes. After listening with impatience Rodin shrugged his shoulders and said: "Why find fault with me? They should find fault with nature!"

And so we return to Mr. Beatty's contention that the artist has succeeded when he has imitated the truth and beauty of nature. The word imitation might seem to limit the artist's personal vision, which must be his very own. How very different this personal vision can be came vividly before me when I visited the Prado in Madrid. In one room are seen the immortal works of Velasquez, among which are the portraits of Philip IV and his consort; and in an adjoining room are portraits of this same Philip and his queen by Rubens, the Fleming, who happened to be temporarily in Madrid on a diplomatic mission. The Spaniard saw his sovereigns in all their splendor, but with a solemn dignity, dark haired and sallow complexioned. While the man from Antwerp saw the forms

more round and amiable, the hair and flesh more blond and colourful, and unconsciously injected the blood of the Netherlands into the veins of his Spanish sitters.

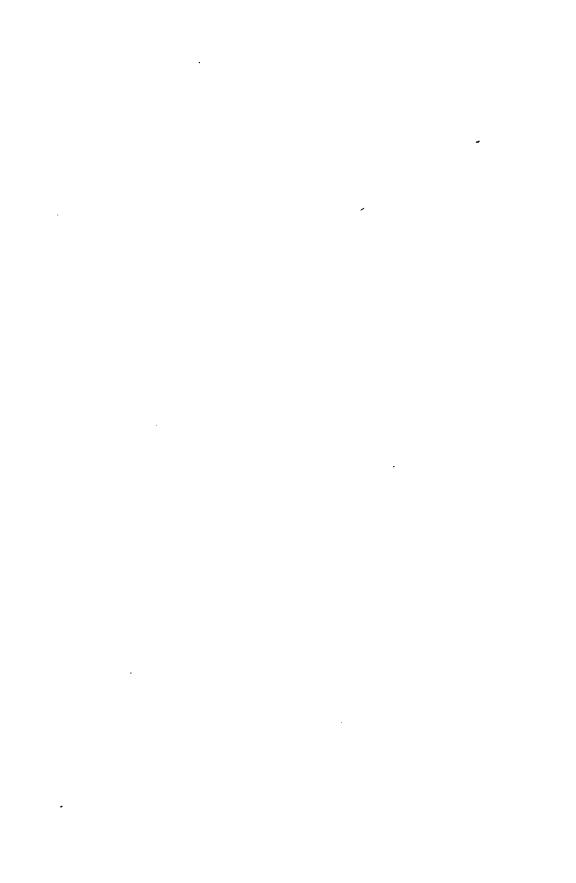
Notwithstanding this personal expression, the predilection of a Rubens for the more florid colours, of a Velasquez for the more subdued, sober notes found in nature, it remains true that the end sought by both is the representation of character as it exists in nature.

GARI MELCHERS.

Belmont, Falmouth, Virginia, January 5, 1922.

"The realities of Nature surpass our most ambitious dreams."

AUGUSTE RODIN





Argument

Ish, if this be found possible, a foundation for the belief that the art of the painter and sculptor is imitative, not creative; that the great master-pieces of art which have withstood the test of time rest firmly upon the supreme expression of character and beauty as these qualities are revealed in man and nature; that it is the mission of art to reveal and make plain these rare and lovely qualities. The truthful representation of these qualities constitutes a common factor which binds all great works together, a fact that is realized in every national gallery of art.

I have chosen to base my argument not upon theory or opinion but upon the evidence of eminent painters and sculptors who have produced great works of art.

Not many able artists have recorded their opinions touching the philosophy of art. On the other hand, writers in abundance have undertaken to define art. A few early and some modern philosophers have given profound thought to the subject and bequeathed to us their opinions. Painters and sculptors, with few exceptions, however, have confined their efforts to searching for, and revealing by their art, beauty and character. More is the pity, because opinion supported by achievement is always more valuable than judgment which rests solely upon theory or observation.

The great masters who have directed brush and chisel in the performance of their work must have known what their purpose was; they certainly knew better than any one else, and they undoubtedly realized how far they had succeeded, or how far they had fallen short of securing the qualities which they had discovered and which they had undertaken to reveal. The evidence of these men is invaluable. Its importance bears an exact relation to their success in producing great and enduring works. This is true in every other field of human endeavor and it is equally true in the field of art. The opinion of the great astronomer with reference to astronomy is more valuable than that of the layman; the opinion of the great painter than that of the amateur. The man who knows any science so perfectly that he can practice it successfully, the

artist who knows his art and nature so well that he can produce great works of art, these have earned the right to express their opinions. I think this must be accepted as a fundamental truth. It is therefore to the painter and sculptor that I turn for judgment. I have been aided in this inquiry by knowledge of the opinions of many of the able painters and sculptors of our own time. Intimate discussion has stimulated further inquiry, and a conviction which was originally based upon familiarity with the methods and purpose of the painter has been confirmed.





The Artist and His Purpose

URING all the great periods of art able men have striven earnestly to attain a knowledge of character and beauty and to achieve their truthful representation. Even when the purpose of the artist has been to express some specific idea or to record some incident or historical event, the work has lived, not because of the idea conveyed or the interest which attaches to the subject, but because it has portrayed character in a powerful manner, or because it has expressed the qualities of beauty which are inherent in nature. Upon these qualities, as they have been understood and translated by the artist, has depended the life of every great painting and work of sculpture. I believe this to be a fundamental and far reaching truth, accepted almost universally by painters and sculptors. This, I know, is equivalent to saying that the chief value of a work of art lies in its power to give aesthetic pleasure.

These observations may suggest a question as to

the relative importance of a work of art which tells a story or records historical events as compared with one which appeals solely to the aesthetic sense or the love of beauty. Human language, it would seem to me, is the logical method for conveying thought from one mind to another and offers direct, untrammelled mental contact without the intervention of form or design of any kind, while the representation of beauty for beauty's sake alone is the more direct and effective way of creating and stimulating in the human heart a love of nature and art.

This, however, is not the question considered in this work. The question raised is simply this: Has the artist, in representing the evanescent effects of nature, the manifold beauties and harmonies with which we are surrounded in this world, or predominant character as expressed by man, exceeded nature either by virtue of his exceptional power or as a result of any personal quality which he may impart to the work?

It is also manifestly true that the greatness of a work of art must depend upon the mental power of the artist, that power which enables him to apprehend or discover the essential qualities existing in nature. It is equally true that every artist, even though wholly absorbed in the effort to reveal the truth and beauty which exist in nature, expresses in some degree his own personality. He does this inevitably, first, by the type of subject he chooses to study and represent, and, second, but in a less important degree, by the technical manner employed. This is, of course, well understood by every one. It is not for a moment disputed. But beyond and above this personal expression stands, as the chief and highest purpose of the artist, the representation of truth and character as these do actually exist.

While the painter has used his art to record history, to tell stories, and to express emotions and convictions, his chief mission is to extract from nature her many beautiful forms and harmonies and to present these in pleasing fashion. In this way the artisan, drawing upon the great multitude of beautiful forms and colours exhibited by nature and so lavishly spread everywhere in the animal and plant creations, cunningly fashions patterns and combinations, weaving these into rugs and adapting them to the many beautiful objects with which we are familiar.

Notwithstanding these accepted facts, I am convinced that the great works of the painter and sculptor, those of supreme importance, rest not upon any of these devices or expressions of art,

but upon the faithful, unerring and masterly representation of character and beauty as these do actually exist. The masterpieces of art as they live today in the national art galleries of the world establish this fact. They seem to possess a common factor without regard to subject or period which unites in a common family the great paintings of the entire history of art. This factor I believe to be the quality of truth. These great works owe their existence to the fact that they faithfully represent some great outstanding type, or because they truthfully reveal the characteristic and essential beauty of nature expressed in one of her many moods. They are important just in proportion as their masters have understood these qualities and recorded their impressions on canvas and in marble.

I know perfectly well that the opinion here expressed is not the one most widely accepted; it is not the popular view of art; it is not the view expressed by many writers upon this subject.

The opinion most widely accepted is that the artist creates beauty; that in some mysterious way, by virtue of a special gift, he does actually evolve from within his own consciousness forms of grace and loveliness; that however deeply the artist sinks himself in nature, art yet remains intensely indi-

vidual; that in representing nature he adds to that which he secures from nature a personal quality which becomes the most important part of the work. This is the theory of art accepted very generally, but it is not supported by evidence.

The main purpose of this writing is, in fact, to establish by the evidence of the men who are quoted that their reliance has been solely upon nature and their success in exact proportion to their knowledge of nature and their ability to portray her predominant qualities. Let me repeat, however, that the ability to see and understand nature is dependent upon mental power. The man of limited mental power will see little; the one of great power will see much. The latter will apprehend the subtle, elusive qualities in a way impossible to the former. This, I know, is equivalent to saying that the great artist must bring to his task a great mind. This assumption is quite correct. A great mind is that power which is vaguely described as genius; it is what enables men to accomplish great things in every field of human endeavor. The question, therefore, is not whether the great artist possesses superior power, but rather how important are the inevitable traces of personal predilection or technical manner revealed in nearly all works of art as compared with the truthful presentation of the

fundamental qualities the artist has discovered and undertaken to represent.

Let us examine this phase of the question more fully. A painting by Corot for instance bears, first, the evidence of Corot's choice of subject. That which appealed to him in nature he painted. The kind of thing he loved, the phase of nature he chose, unquestionably bore evidence of his personal temperament or predilection. By this he expressed his personal taste, his discriminating judgment, himself, in fact. If the artist be a man of gentle and sensitive quality, he will select for representation, as Corot did, a phase of nature which is in accord with his feeling.

In the second place, a painting by Corot will exhibit in a very obvious way the manifest impress of the artist's technical method. In fact, the manner by which the work is performed, that which is termed technic, the very manner in which the artist touches the canvas, becomes a distinguishing and individual characteristic intimately associated with the artist and easily recognized. However, the technical treatment is of little significance. It is in an important sense pure mannerism, often the result of habit or early professional training. In a limited sense it is the handwriting of the artist. This technical side of a painting, the obvious and super-

ficial aspect, is, I am convinced, given by the amateur an importance out of all proportion to its value.

We must, however, deal with this personal phase of a work of art. The question is how important is this personal expression as compared with the more profound truth of nature. If we may accept the testimony of the painters and sculptors who have produced enduring works of art, we will, I think, be convinced that this quality is not important when compared with essential truth or predominant character. The artists whose opinions you will read seem almost without exception to attach greater importance to the expression of the character of the person or object represented than to the expression of personal temperament. Indeed, they seem to be oblivious to the qualities which attract and occupy the attention of the writer and amateur, but they are insistent upon the paramount importance of truth.

What this all-important quality is may be further explained by a simple illustration.

Abraham Lincoln was an outstanding type. The painter or sculptor cannot by his art enhance either the beauty or strength of Lincoln's character. The utmost he can hope to do is to realize that character in its richness and fullness of power. In everything

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the artist touches in his effort to reproduce this character his taste will be displayed, even in the treatment of details, the adjustment of draperies and accessories, the appropriateness of gesture or movement; but all these things, including the technic displayed, will be subordinate to Lincoln's character. The great, outstanding, dominant character of Abraham Lincoln exists as a masterpiece of nature far outranking in perfection any description or portraiture. The man who best reads or comprehends this character and who most faithfully represents it, will produce the greatest work of art. In the effort to do this, the painter or sculptor will undoubtedly leave traces of his own individuality or temperament, but these qualities must not be confused with the dominant character of a Lincoln or given undue importance. The highest purpose of the artist is to faithfully represent character.



Ancient Conceptions of Art

LOSELY allied to the thought that the painter creates beauty is the ancient tradition that the artist is inspired to produce works of art. This conviction had its origin very early in the history of art. In the time of Praxiteles this belief was entertained by many; it was thought, for instance, that in the production of the Aphrodite of Knidos the sculptor was inspired by the goddess herself.

This conception of art doubtless grew out of the fact that the early art of the Egyptians and Greeks was largely devoted to the representation of deities and to the erection of temples which should be their shrines. This association of art with the gods and their temples doubtless contributed to the belief that the artist was inspired or that he possessed a superior power or the gift of inspiration.

Closely allied with this thought was the conception expressed by Hegel with reference to a dis- Hegel tinction between the external and material forms

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of art and the spirit which he suggests permeates the work and of which it is a manifestation. Hegel, although accepting the theory that "art has the vocation of revealing the truth in the form of sensuous artistic shape," speaks of the union of the material with the spiritual in a manner, which although quite true in abstract reasoning, contributes to this impression. Discussing Architecture as a Fine Art, he wrote: "The material of architecture is matter itself in its immediate externality as a heavy mass subject to mechanical laws, and its forms remain the forms of inorganic nature, but are merely arranged and ordered in accordance with the abstract rules of the understanding, the rules of symmetry. But in such material and in such forms the ideal as concrete spirituality cannot be realized; the reality which is represented in them remains, therefore, alien to the spiritual idea, as something external which it has not penetrated or with which it has but a remote and abstract relation. . . Into this temple now enters the God himself. The lightning-flash of individuality strikes the inert mass, permeates it, and a form no longer merely symmetrical, but infinite and spiritual, concentrates and molds its adequate bodily shape." No one today in the presence of a superb relic of architecture asks whether or not it is the

abiding place of a spirit. It is accepted as expressing the spirit of beauty and is enjoyed for this alone.

Hegel's conception of a work of art, frequently expressed in his philosophy, was that the content or idea is the important thing. This conception conformed to early art because painting and sculpture were employed primarily to express ideas.

With the development of the Landscape School of Art and the enjoyment of art on the purely aesthetic side, modern thought has materially changed. Gradually our appreciation of the beautiful for its own sake has developed. The influence of this movement has reacted upon all phases of art expression, and even those works which express ideas in the sense of subject matter have come to be judged upon the basis of aesthetic beauty, rather than with reference to the idea or content as thus defined.

Therefore what Hegel says applies to the early conception of art rather than to that of the present time.

Another conception of art suggests the union of the beautiful with the good. The philosophy of Socrates teaches this. He regarded the beautiful Socrates as coincident with the good, and both of them as resolvable into the useful. He does not seem to

have attached importance to the immediate gratification which a beautiful object affords to perception and contemplation, but rather to have emphasized its power of furthering the more necessary ends of life.

These early theories and conceptions with reference to art may in some degree account for the prevalence of an impression, even in our own time, that the artist is inspired or that he creates his masterpiece as the result of some supernatural power. It has always seemed to the inexperienced that the creation of a work of art implies an element of mystery or represents something inexplicable. What is to the painter a natural process becomes mysterious. Nothing existed on the blank canvas and behold, presently, there appears a picture simulating life. Having no knowledge of the methods employed, or of the years of patient labor required to secure the technical ability to represent the actual truth and spirit of natural objects, the result seems far removed from the ordinary. Thence it is but a step to the point of view that the artist is one "inspired."

Although the conception of a work of art which places it above nature is very old, I do not recall a definition made under this impression which seems satisfactory. There is always apparent the effort

to compromise or bring together two distinct conceptions—the one attributing to the work a quality superior to nature and the other demanding that it be a truthful representation of nature. Defining a work of art as something superior to nature, and at the same time insisting that it represent nature faithfully is an inconsistency eternally cropping out.

markable acumen and expressed his conviction Constable with precision when he said: "It appears to me that pictures have been over-valued; held up by a blind admiration as ideal things, and almost as standards by which nature is to be judged rather than the reverse; and this false estimate has been sanctioned by the extravagant epithets that have been applied to painters, as 'the divine,' 'the inspired,' and so forth. Yet, in reality what are the most sublime productions of the pencil but selections of some of the forms of nature, and copies of a few of her evanescent effects; the result, not of

This, then, is my argument: First, that art is the expression of supreme or predominant character and the representation of grace and harmony as these qualities exist in nature; and, second, that

inspiration, but of long and patient study, under

the direction of much good sense."

John Constable touched this subject with re- John

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the truthful rendering of these qualities is the high mission of the painter and sculptor.



Evidence of Painters and Sculptors

I we will now turn to the evidence bearing upon this subject, we will discover what I have already indicated, namely, that the able artists who have expressed opinions touching the philosophy of their art have done so in no uncertain terms, and that the opinions which refer art to nature as the highest source seem convincing. We will also discover that not only do the majority of able painters agree upon what art really is, and express their opinions with clearness and precision, but that many of the philosophers of recent and ancient times define art in the same forceful way.

Let us first examine opinions expressed by painters and sculptors.

Michelangelo wrote: "In my judgment that is Michelangelo the excellent and divine painting which is most like and best imitates any work of immortal God, whether a human figure, or a wild and strange animal, or a simple and easy fish, or a bird of the

air, or any other creature. . . . To imitate perfectly each of these things in its species seems to me to be nothing else but to desire to imitate the work of immortal God. And yet that thing will be the most noble and perfect in the works of painting which in itself reproduced the thing which is most noble and of the greatest delicacy and knowledge." Michelangelo thus reduces the philosophy of art to the simple problem of selection, and the faithful and truthful representation of the dominant, the graceful, the harmonious, and the beautiful in nature. His statement, which so simply, even quaintly, expresses the opinion of a great master whose works have commanded the homage of the world during nearly four centuries, is worthy of the most careful consideration. It reveals his reliance upon nature without confusion of thought or pretension of any kind. There are here no intricate definitions of art or complex theories concerning his method of creating his masterly representations of the best he found in nature—"the thing which is most noble!"

The universality of this profound truth and of its independence of local conditions and circumstances is emphasized by the fact that another great master of another race, one whose technical methods and choice of subjects differed widely

from those of Michelangelo, expressed the same reliance upon nature. Albrecht Dürer was a con- Albrecht temporary of Michelangelo, but he worked under widely different conditions. It is the great fundamental quality of truth so quaintly commended by Michelangelo that distinguishes the works of Albrecht Dürer. Albrecht Dürer wrote: "Life in Nature proves the truth of these things; therefore consider her diligently, guide thyself by her, and swerve not from Nature, thinking that thou canst find something better of thyself, for thou wilt be deceived. For Art standeth firmly fixed in Nature, and whoso can thence rend her forth, he only possesseth her."

We find in Leonardo da Vinci's notebook reference to this same principle. He recommends application to the study of the works of nature and advises the student to withdraw as far as possible from the companionship of others in order that he may more earnestly and effectively do this. His sage advice emphasizes the importance of study. "The eye, which is called the window of the soul, is the chief means whereby the understanding may most fully and abundantly appreciate the infinite works of nature. . . . All visible things derive their existence from nature, and from these same things is born painting."

Leonardo da Vinci

William Hogarth Another painter who has written his opinion upon this subject is William Hogarth, who said: "Nature is simple, plain, and true, in all her works, and those who strictly adhere to her laws, and closely attend to her appearances in their infinite varieties, are guarded against any prejudiced bias from truth."

Sir Joshua Reynolds

Of the great painters who have touched upon the philosophy of art in their writings, no one has written, shall I say, more fluently than has Sir Joshua Reynolds. He may even be said to have been eloquent. His lectures prepared for the students of the Royal Academy have been famous for a century and a half. They have not only inspired generations of art students with a keener interest in art, but they are probably the most helpful utterances upon the subject given to the world in his time or since. It seems to me, however, that, as is often the case where great facility of expression is practiced, Reynolds employs a term which, without clear definition, confuses the mind. This is true where he frequently uses the term "genius." The term is associated in popular belief with the power to create works of art. Although using a term which is at least subject to this interpretation, Reynolds definitely denies to the human mind this power, asserting that the power to create is simply

the power to imitate nature. Reynolds wrote: "I am on the contrary persuaded that by imitation only, variety, and even originality of invention, is produced. I will go further; even genius, at least what generally is so called, is the child of imitation." He further says: "The study of nature is the beginning and the end of theory. It is in nature only we can find that beauty which is the great object of our search; it can be found nowhere else; we can no more form any idea of beauty superior to nature than we can form an idea of a sixth sense. or any other excellence out of the limits of the human mind." Reynolds again writes: "Invention, strictly speaking, is little more than a new combination of those images which have been previously gathered and deposited in the memory: nothing can come of nothing: he who has laid up no materials can produce no combinations."

John Constable, a contemporary of Reynolds, John and to whose judgment we have already referred, Constable further expressed his opinion upon this subject. A statement of principle by him seems to be conviction crystallized. Constable, although unaccustomed to writing, even unaccustomed to discussion, because he was a man of quiet and simple life, seems to have thought profoundly; and when the rare occasion to express his opinion did come he

condensed within a few words a great fundamental principle with unerring precision. His definition of the purpose and method of the artist cannot, I think, be excelled for accuracy or fullness of meaning. He wrote: "In art, there are two modes by which men aim at distinction; in the one, by a careful application to what others have accomplished, the artist imitates their works, or selects and combines their various beauties: in the other, he seeks excellence at its primitive source, nature. In the first, he forms a style upon the study of pictures, and produces either imitative or eclectic art; in the second, by a close observation of nature, he discovers qualities existing in her which have never been portrayed before, and thus forms a style which is original. The results of the one mode, as they repeat that with which the eye is already familiar, are soon recognized and estimated, while the advances of the artist in a new path must necessarily be slow, for few are able to judge of that which deviates from the usual course, or qualified to appreciate original studies." There is here no mystery or ambiguity. This is the statement of a profound truth by a great painter who knew perfectly his reliance upon nature. It was prompted by the conviction of a great mind which saw only the underlying fact and abjured all triv-

ialities and hair-splitting theories. In his mental attitude and grasp, Constable was like Winslow Homer, a man of few words, one given to much thought and to firm convictions.

In one of his lectures at the Royal Institution of Great Britain, Constable said: "It was said by Sir Thomas Lawrence, that 'we can never hope to Sir Thomas compete with nature in the beauty and delicacy of Lawrence her separate forms or colours, our only chance lies in selection and combination."

Gilbert Stuart expressed a like reliance upon Gilbert nature when he said: "You must copy nature, but Stuart if you leave nature for an imaginary effect, you will lose all. Nature cannot be excused, and as your object is to copy nature, it is the height of folly to work at anything else to produce that copy."

Corot was equally assured of the importance of Corot this principle to an artist. He said: "Truth is the first thing in art, and the second, and the third."

Let us take the opinion of another able painter, that of Millet, who said: "Men of genius are, as Millet it were, endowed with a divining-rod. Some discover one thing in nature, some another, according to their temperament. . . . The mission of men of genius is to reveal that portion of nature's riches which they have discovered, to those who would

never have suspected their existence. They interpret nature to those who cannot understand her language."

"I should like to do nothing which was not the result of an impression received from the appearance of nature, either in landscape or figures."

"I should express the type very strongly, the type being, to my mind, the most powerful truth."

These opinions are at once simple and comprehensive. They express the thoughts of men who have achieved great works. Indeed, I have never heard the able master of art say otherwise than that he has striven with all his power, sometimes in despair, to wrest from nature the subtle beauties of form and colour possessed by her and discovered by those who have the power to perceive and understand these qualities. Nature is the supreme standard, attained to only in part. We may accept nature as the source of all beauty and harmony in art and rest assured that the stream has never risen above its source.

The opinions here quoted do not differ materially from those expressed by painters of our own time.

Whistler

I recall that Whistler upon the occasion of one of my visits expressed an opinion upon this subject. Whistler's "White Girl," "Girl at the Piano" and many other works are such notable examples of truthful representation as to give weight to his opinion. The absolute certainty with which the several parts of these pictures exist in relation to each other cannot be overstated.

In response to my inquiry regarding the most important quality in the art of the painter, Whistler said: "Art is the science of the beautiful. The parts of nature bear a certain relation to each other, and this relation is as true as a mathematical fact. People sometimes say my pictures are dark. That depends upon whether or not the subject was dark; whether the conditions made it dark. If a dark or low toned phase of nature is selected, then the picture must be absolutely true to those conditions."

"There it is, the subject. Certain relations exist between the value notes, and these relations must be reproduced absolutely. Two and two make four—that is a simple truth in mathematics as it is in nature. Two and two make four—the trouble is that many painters do not see that two and two make four. They do not see this fine relationship which results in a simple truth. Not seeing, they try all kinds of numbers."

Turning from the easel in front of which we were standing, Whistler lifted a book from the table with a quick, almost nervous action, and as

he opened it said with a quizzical expression, "It is all in here." The book was the "Gentle Art of Making Enemies." Turning quickly to the paragraph he had in mind, he read, "Nature contains the elements, in colour and form, of all pictures, as the keyboard contains the notes of all music. But the artist is born to pick, and choose, and group with science, these elements, that the result may be beautiful." He continued to read for a good part of an hour. Whistler by Whistler was an inimitable and rare treat. The slightest shade of meaning was expressed with great delicacy, by inflection and gesture.

At the end of very many years of study and observation, Whistler's sensitive appreciation and power of selection were extraordinary. The most subtle and harmonious qualities in nature made an irresistible appeal to him. He has described this faculty as the power to pick and choose. By the very choice of many of his subjects he was enabled to eliminate all insignificant details and thereby to render the harmonies of nature as they appeared to him. He described his method or mental attitude with reference to nature when he said: "As the light fades and the shadows deepen all petty and exacting details vanish, everything trivial disappears, and I see things as they are, in great strong masses."

This represents Whistler in the presence of subdued and gentle qualities in nature, but it was the same Whistler, without modification or change in his attitude with respect to nature, who rendered with such startling realism and absolute fidelity to truth in his marvellous etchings the shipping, the city, and the river Thames. Under the blazing light of noonday the masts and rigging of the ships, the forms and details of the hulls, even the tile upon the roofs of the city houses were distinctly seen. He recorded his impressions manifestly without the slightest deviation from the simple truth of form and value. No one who has studied Whistler's set of the Thames etchings will for an instant dispute this statement. The quality of simple truth is so astonishingly present in every line and form in these works that no argument is needed touching this point. The Whistler who made these etchings, the Whistler who painted the "White Girl" and the "Girl at the Piano," must be reconciled with the Whistler who painted the evening symphonies representing the river, the "Portrait of Sarasate," and other works of subdued and gentle qualities. The simple truth is that Whistler was as faithful and scientific in the one case as in the other, and that the result depended upon his choice of subject, and the time, and effect

observed. I am told that in his later period he sought after and discovered means of securing the more gentle aspects of nature; that he toned and diffused the light in his studio scientifically by the use of semi-transparent window curtains. However this may be, it is undoubtedly true that he did rely upon the effect actually before him and that he sought to represent the subdued effect in his studio or the gentle light of evening so beautifully described by him in his "Ten O'Clock." It would be difficult to imagine a more beautiful pen picture than this description by Whistler. It indicates his love for the gentle and harmonious qualities in nature.

"When the evening mist clothes the riverside with poetry, as with a veil, and the poor buildings lose themselves in the dim sky, and the tall chimneys become campanili, and the warehouses palaces in the night, and the whole city hangs in the heavens, and fairyland is before us—then the wayfarer hastens home; the workingman and the cultured one, the wise man and the one of pleasure, cease to understand, as they have ceased to see, and Nature, who, for once, has sung in tune, sings her exquisite song to the artist alone, her son and her master—her son in that he loves her, her master in that he knows her."

This power to select and represent the beautiful

qualities in nature, a power which is the result of repeated efforts, has been defined by Abbott H. Abbott Thayer with rare skill and poetic beauty. "It is Thayer as though a man were shown a crystal, a perfect thing, gleaming below depths of water—far down beyond reach. He would dive and dive again, driven by his great desire to secure it, until finally, all dripping, he brought it up. But that in the end he could bring it—a perfect thing—to us, was possible solely because he had first seen it, gleaming there. Others might dive and dive, might work and labor with endless patience and endless pain, but unless they had first seen the crystal-unless they had been given this divine gift of seeingthis vision—they would come up empty-handed. The occasional so-called genius does not make the crystal, but he alone sees it, where it lies gleaming below depths of water, and by his effort brings it to us. The whole question is how absolutely, how perfectly, the artist sees this vision."

"After the artist has lived, for a certain period, in worship of some particular specimen or type of the form of beauty dearest to him, this crystal-like vision forms, clearer and clearer, at the bottom of his mind, which is, so to speak, his sea of consciousness, until at last the vision is plainly visible to him, and the all-strain and danger-facing time has

come for putting it into the form in which as one of the world's treasures it is to live on."

When asked whether the artist has ever been granted a vision of any beauty which is not based upon the beauty of nature, Thayer exclaimed emphatically, "No, no, no! I don't see the slightest material for any such conception."

And when the question was further put—granted that the artist has the gift of seeing beauty in nature to which others are blind, is his picture Art in proportion as he truthfully records the beauty of the nature that he sees? Mr. Thayer answered, "Yes. Everything in art, in poetry, music, sculpture, or painting, however fantastic it looks to people who are not far enough on that road, is nothing but truth-telling, true reporting of one or another of the great facts of nature—of the universe."

The ability to see, as Thayer suggests, is the very foundation of the artist's power. It is this power of seeing which enables him to discover truth and beauty, and it is the skill of the trained master which enables him to reproduce these for the delight and inspiration of his fellows.

That men are endowed by inheritance with varying degrees of mental power is a self-evident fact. No one will dispute this; it comes within our common experience. Providence has been lavish in the bestowal of extraordinary powers upon the few, but it remains everlastingly true that even with these success depends upon effort. Nothing is more fully established than this truism. The records of successful men in all periods and in every avenue of life bear testimony to this fact.

To the artist, seeing is the all important thing, and to him there is no mystery either in the development of this power or in the result obtained. To him it is simply a matter of logical evolution, the result of the day's work well done. He begins his career as a student by laboriously copying nature. His first studies are, as a rule, hard and unsympathetic. I have not discovered an exception to this rule. In the beginning the art student does not even see colour in its fullness and beauty. Gradually he acquires greater power of perception. He discovers beautiful and harmonious colours in nature which were unseen at first. He realizes the exquisite grace of line to be found on every hand but unperceived before—the movement, charm, and beauty of natural forms. New beauties are revealed from day to day; new harmonies are seen and felt. Presently the inharmonious becomes distasteful; the ugly, intolerable; the offensive, a distress. He comes into the presence of nature with

a new vision. Her beauties are revealed to him. He feels a thrill in the love he bears for the exceptional and profound beauty of an evening sky or a grey day. He never talks about inspiration or soul, although he has searched out the very soul of the landscape. He simply seeks with every power at his command, as Constable, borrowing the thought from Wordsworth, expressed it, "to give 'to one brief moment caught from fleeting time' a lasting and sober existence, and to render permanent many of those splendid but evanescent Exhibitions which are ever occurring in the endless varieties of Nature."

The sculptor, I think, in some such manner lies in wait for the grace and charm of movement, the supreme expression of character and of harmony, as an animal lies in wait for its prey. When one or all of these qualities are seen he seizes his chisel and strives to fix what he has discovered in permanent form.

The artist, looking back over twenty or thirty years of continuous and earnest study, of repeated and laborious effort, and of failures and successes, realizes that the power of perception and selection which he now possesses is the result of these years of observation and labor. He also realizes that he has never quite attained to the full height of his ambition to represent truthfully the supreme qualities of beauty which he has learned to discover in nature.

In the selection of subjects for his works and in the production of arrangements or combinations representing either grace, beauty of colour and form, or essential character, the painter or sculptor is aided by two very powerful influences.

The first of these is his inherited or acquired taste. Step by step, precept upon precept, first as a student in the art school, then as an artist, this faculty known as taste is cultivated, increased, until with rare discrimination and judgmenthe selects, "picks and chooses," as Whistler said, the things of beauty and harmony, being guided all the while by the unwritten law of harmony of which we are all conscious. To arrive at this consummation of the artist's highest endeavors is not an easy task.

His course may be, and often is, a very delightful and agreeable one, but it is one of infinite effort and labor. Before the painter acquires this knowledge or power which enables him to discriminate with judgment and taste, selecting those forms and colours expressive of harmony, grace and beauty, he must have served an apprenticeship of many long years. The sculptor who would aspire to the exquisite and discriminating taste of a

Rodin, who observes with patience and who seizes with marvellous skill upon the very essence of grace as it is expressed by the human figure, must travel the same tedious road. If the sculptor would read and know character as does a Saint-Gaudens, he must travel many a weary mile over the path which leads to perfection in art.

The second powerful influence helping the artist to acquire knowledge is, as Constable suggested, art itself. The student while pursuing the plodding course of training in the art school and later in a wider field as an artist, is not only searching out in nature the qualities of grace and harmony, but his eyes are constantly turned in the direction of the accumulated records of art. He studies with assiduous care and thought in the great works of all times, the qualities, the harmonies, the character wrested from nature by the able painters and sculptors of the past. Myriads have tried and failed to know and master nature during the past few hundred years, and only the few who have succeeded have left the record of their success. All the weak productions have gone into oblivion. To these really great works the painter and sculptor turn again and again, patiently, persistently, unfalteringly, sometimes through hours of silent study at other times by earnest effort to copy, but

always with a single purpose in mind—to know and master the secrets of the masters. Little by little, always referring the master to nature for confirmation or proof, the artist struggles upward to a more consummate understanding of the works of nature, but he never forsakes or belittles this supreme source of all his power and knowledge.

I recall asking Winslow Homer if he did not Winslow think the beauty existing in nature must be discov- Homer ered and reproduced by the painter. Quick as a flash he answered: "Yes, but the rare thing is to find a painter who knows a good thing when he sees it."

On another occasion we were picking our way along the Maine coast, over the shelving rocks he painted so often and with such insight and power, when I suddenly said: "Homer, do you ever take the liberty, in painting nature, of modifying the colour of any part?"

I recall his manner and expression perfectly. He stopped quickly and exclaimed: Never! When I have selected the thing carefully I paint it exactly as it appears."

During our talk he emphasized, however, the importance of selection. "You must not paint anything you see-you must wait and wait patiently for a particular effect, and then when it comes, if you have sense enough to know it when you do see it—well, that's all there is to that."

At another time, referring contemptuously to the calm ocean under a vacant sky, he said: "I take no interest in that." There came, however, one morning while I was at Prout's Neck a misty and threatening sky. Grey clouds bewitching in their silvery tones went hurrying across the troubled sea. By noon it was blowing a gale and the waves were lashing the coast, sending spray high into the air. Once and again great clouds of mist drove across the deserted rocks, and the music of old ocean rose to an ominous and resounding tone. Presently Homer hurried into my room, clad from head to foot in rubber, and carrying in his arms a storm coat and a pair of sailor's boots. "Come," he said, "quickly! It is perfectly grand."

For an hour we clambered over rocks, holding fast to the wiry shrubs which grew from every crevice, while the spray dashed far overhead. This placid, reserved, self-contained little man was in a fever of excitement, and his delight in the beautiful and almost overpowering expression of the ocean as it foamed and rioted was inspiring. To him this was the supreme expression of beauty and power. The moment he had patiently waited for had come.

Homer's love for and appreciation of those

rugged, elemental qualities in nature resulted in the production of forceful works of great beauty. In the selection of subjects he expressed his individual taste.

I recall an opinion expressed by the late Henry Henry W. W. Ranger to the effect that Tolstoi's definition of Ranger art had never been excelled. He referred to Tolstoi's definition of art as the power to pass on a sensation. Ranger maintained the opinion that art is the expression of the individual's feeling, that the artist uses the facts of nature to express his own sensation and that no great landscape was ever painted directly from nature. "The technical difficulties," he said, "and the rapidly changing effects made it hard to paint out of doors. He could do better by depending upon his memory." It was his opinion that the deeper qualities were secured in the studio; that nature only furnishes the hooks upon which the painter hangs his work; that he in reality expresses his own feeling, the poetry or sentiment which is in himself. Ranger here describes a vague or not clearly defined quality which is referred to as personal temperament. His opinion is in direct contradiction to the almost universal testimony of painters and sculptors, and Ranger himself in his practice failed to maintain it. Although he did not complete his works in the pres-

ence of nature, he made many sketches from nature and copied his larger canvases from these.

I think Ranger at the end of a long career had the power of discovering beautiful qualities in nature and of seeing them profoundly. I knew him well, and many times we discussed art and artists. I found his knowledge broad and intimate. His view that a painter simply passes on a sensation was repeated to me many times. I think one may frankly agree with this opinion, but I do not think a painter originates or creates a sensation. In the presence of nature he simply receives it and then transmits it, the result being dependent upon his natural or acquired power of perception, his memory, and his technical ability.

Ranger's paintings are characterized by an understanding of nature, and this was the result of a lifetime of the most earnest, patient, and persistent study. Probably no modern artist was more industrious, for his studio was filled with studies in colour and many thousands of pencil drawings. Indeed, so familiar was he with the colours and characteristic forms of nature that he frequently reproduced these with much delicacy, relying solely upon his memory and a few accurate pencil notes. In discussing his method, I recall his remark that he painted in the studio because he could get closer

to nature that way than by painting out of doors. Painters universally understand the difficulties of painting in the open because of conflicting lights. They also realize the more certain judgment of the experienced eye when painting in a quiet or more subdued light; but to do this requires great knowledge and a retentive memory.

As illustrating Ranger's method of study and his reliance upon memory, I recall an occasion when he studied long and patiently the union or combination of two colour notes, the sky and water -for we were sailing at the time. He remarked upon the beautiful harmony expressed by these colours. He studied them intently, evidently with the thought of reproducing them later. I also remember a painting expressive of the charm and beauty of a moon-light night. It was painted at his Noank home. I believe this picture was painted almost wholly in his studio. I think it was the result of an infinite number of impressions received as he studied, evening after evening, the ocean and the sky. By this I mean that while Ranger in this painting was passing on a sensation, he was only passing on the truth and beauty of nature as realized by him night after night, and recorded in his memory.

The point here raised is one of vital importance

with reference to the subject under consideration. It is that the painter does not express anything he has not received. He pursues one of two methods: he either secures beautiful qualities in the presence of nature or he reproduces qualities stored in his memory.

John

John La Farge referred to these two methods, La Farge the one by which the painter works directly from nature and the other by which he depends upon his memory, and his opinion bears directly upon the point raised. La Farge wrote: "He [the painter] will then go again to nature, perhaps working directly from it, perhaps only to his memory of sight, for remember, that in what we call working from nature—we painters—we merely use a shorter strain of memory than when we carry back to our studios the vision that we wish to note. And more than that, the very way in which we draw our lines, and mix our pigments, in the hurry of instant record, in the certainty of successful handling, implies that our mind is filled with innumerable memories of continuous trials."

> As La Farge points out, the difference between painting in the presence of nature and painting from memory is only a different span of memory. One painter pursues one way, another a different method. The end sought is the same.

Giovanni Segantini's method was to go to nature Segantini finally. He began his paintings in the studio, working from studies, and finished them in the presence of nature. I recall a delightful visit with this able Italian painter at his home at Maloja, and also his interesting description of his method. His art was little known at that time, some twenty vears ago. His works are now well known to art lovers throughout the world.

I had but recently seen his "Ploughing in the Engadine" at an exhibition in the Bavarian capital. It impressed me as possessing a very vital quality. The technical manner seemed at that time strange and unusual. Like worsted, the colours stretched across the sky. The earth clods were small strands of colour, revealing, on close examination, a rarely prodigal palette. This phase of Segantini's art interested me on the purely technical side. The effect of the picture was startling. It was like a breath of fresh and fragrant air from the mountains of Switzerland.

It was following this impression received from his painting that I visited the painter at Maloja. Leaving Chiavenna early one morning, the coach slowly climbed the mountainside and, presently, crossed the apex of the range. There lay at our feet the beautiful valley of the Engadine. I carried

away from Maloja many delightful impressions, but the two dominating all others were these: the earnestness of the painter, and his unwavering dependence upon nature.

He showed me large drawings or cartoons of some of his well known subjects representing the arrangement of the compositions and the balancing of the various parts of his pictures. The drawings were made in crayon and suggested in line the technical treatment of his paintings. From these sketches he transferred the drawings to canvas. In this way he saved time and labor. When a drawing was thus transferred to a canvas he carried the canvas to the scene of his subject, where he painted invariably directly from nature. When I asked if he ever completed a picture in the studio, he said: "Absolutely no! I always finish my pictures in the presence of nature."

Segantini spoke his last word, if I may adopt this form of expression, in the very presence of and under the influence of nature. This to him was the supreme moment in the execution of his work.

Another illustration of the method of a great painter in relying upon his memory for the truths and facts of nature is found in Anton Mauve. Mauve's power is unquestioned. He was one of the great modern Dutch painters. His pictures are

Anton Mauve

always direct and forceful. His knowledge of nature was profound. This knowledge was the result of effort and study. Among his early drawings are found studies from nature which, in spirit, are wholly unlike his later productions. They reveal Mauve as a student of nature who was untiring in his effort to draw minute details with unflinching accuracy. I recall pencil studies of sheep, horses, cows, and plants which have rarely ever been excelled in the delineation of detail, not even by a master draughtsman like Barque. Mauve's knowledge of nature acquired by this method was intimate and deep. His later manner was based upon a solid foundation. It was by this knowledge he was enabled to depict the more characteristic forms with a few hastily drawn lines. He knew well how important are broad, essential masses in art and he rendered these, eliminating non-essentials and trivial details. His sense of design or appropriate balance of parts was keen and sure; nearly all his pictures possess the distinguishing quality of simplicity. Like Ranger, he preferred to paint his pictures in the studio, but his reliance was, in the highest sense, upon nature.

I recall a visit to Mauve's country, a country of sand dunes and pastures. These he loved and painted. One of Mauve's students, an able etcher,



Opinions of Philosophers and Writers

They seem to be supported by the opinions of able writers and philosophers who have dealt with this subject. If the opinions of these writers are less authoritative, they are nevertheless important as representing the thought of profound scholars. They cover practically the entire period of writing upon art. While diversified in the manner of approach, they will be found to unite in a common theory. These writers naturally deal with mental processes; with the attributes of the mind; with the philosophy of the subject.

Schopenhauer

Schopenhauer defines genius as pre-eminent capacity for contemplation which ends in the object. "Now," he says, "as this requires that a man should entirely forget himself and the relations in which he stands, genius is simply complete objectivity, i.e., the objective tendency of the mind, as opposed

to the subjective, which is directed to one's own self-in other words, to the will. Thus genius is the faculty of continuing in the state of pure perception, of losing one's self in perception, and of enlisting in this service the knowledge which originally existed only for the service of the will; that is to say, genius is the power of leaving one's own interests, wishes, and aims entirely out of sight, and thus of entirely renouncing one's own personality for a time, so as to remain pure knowing subject, clear vision of the world—and this not merely at moments, but for a sufficient length of time and with sufficient consciousness to enable one to reproduce by deliberate art what has thus been apprehended, and 'to fix in lasting thoughts the wavering images that float before the mind."

Schopenhauer's definition of genius is probably more accurate and more logical than that of any other writer. In his opinion, genius is the power of pre-eminent perception. The artist only exceeds his fellows in that his perception is keener; that he is able to see and understand more perfectly than others. When an able painter approaches nature in this spirit, forgetting all else, as Schopenhauer suggests, the result is usually a masterpiece. To such a painter is attributed the quality known as genius.

Taine

Taine defines art as the power of perceiving the essential character of an object. Taine says: "The character of an object strikes him [the artist] and the effect of this sensation is a strong, peculiar impression. . . . But art itself, which is the faculty of perceiving and expressing the leading character of objects, is as enduring as the civilization of which it is the best and earliest fruit. . . . To give full prominence to a leading character is the object of a work of art. It is owing to this that the closer a work of art approaches this point the more perfect it becomes; in other words, the more exactly and completely these conditions are complied with, the more elevated it becomes on the scale. Two of these conditions are necessary; it is necessary that the character should be the most notable possible and the most dominant possible. . . . The masterpiece is that in which the greatest force receives the greatest development. In the language of the painter, the superior work is that in which the character possessing the greatest possible value in nature receives from art all the increase in value that is possible. . . . It is essential, then, to closely imitate something in an object; but not everything." After defining the essential quality by two illustrations—the illustration of the lion and the illustration of the dominant characteristics of a flat country like Holland, Taine continues: "Through its innumerable effects, you judge of the importance of this essential character. It is this which art must bring forward into proper light, and if this task devolves upon art it is because nature fails to accomplish it. In nature this essential character is simply dominant; it is the aim of art to render it predominant. . . . Man is sensible of this deficiency, and to remove it he has invented art."

Froude touches upon this point in his reference Froude to the art of the writer. He said he would turn to Shakespeare for the best history of England because of his (Shakespeare's) absolute truth to character and event. "We wonder," Froude wrote, "at the grandeur, the moral majesty, of some of Shakespeare's characters, so far beyond what the noblest among ourselves can imitate, and at first thought we attribute it to the genius of the poet, who has outstripped Nature in his creations. But we are misunderstanding the power and the meaning of poetry in attributing creativeness to it in any such sense. Shakespeare created, but only as the spirit of Nature created around him, working in him as it worked abroad in those among whom he lived. The men whom he draws were such men as he saw and knew; the words they utter were

such as he heard in the ordinary conversations in which he joined. At the Mermaid with Raleigh and with Sidney, and at a thousand unnamed English firesides, he found the living originals for his Prince Hals, his Orlandos, his Antonios, his Portias, his Isabellas. The closer personal acquaintance which we can form with the English of the age of Elizabeth, the more we are satisfied that Shakespeare's great poetry is no more than the rhythmic echo of the life which it depicts."

Baumgarten

Baumgarten concluded, from Leibnitz' theory of a pre-established harmony and its consequence, that the world is the best possible, that nature is the highest embodiment of beauty, and that art must seek as its highest function the strictest possible imitation of nature.

Leibnitz

Bosanquet says: "The greatest degree of perfection was to be found, according to Leibnitz, in the existing universe, every other possible system being as a whole less perfect."

Kant

Kant deals with a phase of this subject which is of great interest. In many strong works of art there remain incomplete and often unsatisfactory details. These are permitted to remain because the artist knows that to remove them would weaken or affect the strength of the whole. These, Kant says, are "only of necessity suffered to remain, because they could hardly be removed without loss of force to the idea. This courage has merit only in the case of a genius. A certain boldness of expression, and, in general, many a deviation from the common rule becomes him well; but in no sense is it a thing worthy of imitation. On the contrary it remains all through intrinsically a blemish which one is bound to try to remove, but for which the genius is, as it were, allowed to plead a privilege, on the ground that a scrupulous carefulness would spoil what is inimitable in the impetuous ardor of his soul."

The genius here referred to by Kant is well understood and his power is fully recognized, but he is not separated from his fellow craftsmen except in the degree of his knowledge and ability. He is a man of superior ability and power who, driving straight to the object of his labor, represents character in a direct and forceful way. To this end he brings to his assistance his superior technical skill, but often in the very impetuosity of his ardor, as Kant suggests, he leaves unfinished parts because he well understands that to labor over these parts would be to reduce the force or power of the whole. This impetuous manner which strives to render the character of the object or person, or of the scene, or of the ephemeral effects

of nature, quickly and directly, is well understood by the painter. I recall a large sketch of Daubigny's owned by Mesdag, probably purchased from the painter. This sketch represents a green hillside with a canal and horses in the foreground. For absolute power and truth of beautiful quality and colour it was probably never surpassed by Daubigny, but it is what the public would call an unfinished picture. In truth, force, and beauty, it might fairly be considered "inspired" as compared with Daubigny's finished or carefully painted pictures so widely known. In this painting there are many unsatisfactory parts, such as are referred to by Kant as "deformities," but Daubigny well understood that to remove them or to work over this sketch, which was doubtless made rapidly in the presence of nature and under the influence of the particular mood expressed by nature, would have weakened its power.

I recall another painting that will illustrate this point—a study by Anton Mauve. This study was found among Mauve's possessions after his death, and was probably never offered for sale during his lifetime because, in minor parts, it is incomplete. Rough lines of the original drawing were permitted to remain. These are the kind of blemishes to which Kant refers, but they do not detract from

the supreme beauty and power of the study. Indeed, this picture is considered by many painters to be one of Mauve's masterpieces, so true and just is it in the representation of a momentary effect in nature. Mauve doubtless recognized the importance of the study and refused to make corrections of minor defects. I have been told that he replied to Weissenbrouck, a fellow painter who urged him to finish this work: "I will leave it as God made it in nature. It is finished." Mauve had secured the broad, essential truth of nature and with this he was content.

Maurice Maeterlinck tersely expressed the Maeterlinck same thought when he said: "I myself have now for a long time ceased to look for anything more beautiful in this world, or more interesting, than the truth . . ."

The reader will not have failed to observe the significant note of agreement running through these opinions touching the importance of selection, the power to perceive and select from among the multitude of forms those which are exceptional or dominant.

"Pure perception"; "the faculty of perceiving and expressing the leading character of objects"; "In nature this essential character is simply dominant; it is the aim of art to render it predomi-

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nant..."; these expressions of philosophers are in perfect accord with the expressions of painters, as for instance, "The only thing is to see"; or "our only chance lies in selection and combination."

Symmetry

I what has been written is true, if art is but the revelation of grace and beauty inherent in nature, the making plain that which is revealed to the artist and obscure to the less observant, or to those with less power, it still remains to account for the universal distinction in form which characterizes all great works of art. Reference has been made to the common factor of truth, but there is a second factor or quality possessed by works of art, that of symmetry. This attribute lifts a work above the commonplace and, combined with truth, places it among the masterpieces of art.

There are certain fundamental laws of symmetry existing in nature and these, consciously or unconsciously, govern the masters of art in the production of their works. These undefined laws have been recognized from the earliest time, and the artist who is governed by them in the selection of his subjects and controlled by them in the execution

of his work makes a universal appeal to which the aesthetic sense in man responds. These laws are not of man's creation. They belong to nature. They exist in form and colour. They also exist in sound. Whether or not the Greeks had reduced these laws to definite principles or rules, and were governed by them in the construction of their temples and in the creation of their masterly works in sculpture, is a doubtful question; but certain it is that Hambidge has shown quite conclusively that certain fundamental proportions existing in natural forms are repeated in the Parthenon and in other great architectural structures belonging to the Grecian period.

This does not mean that every great work of art must of necessity be based upon clearly defined, rigid rules of proportion, on what is called Dynamic Symmetry, but rather that works made to conform to these rules do possess a degree of distinction and that the result is an orderliness of arrangement or an agreeable disposition of spaces with relation to each other which produces an aesthetic effect upon the human mind.

Therefore, while truth is essential, it is conceded that symmetry must be added to secure distinction. Commonplace expressions of nature, while satisfying the ignorant, have never been accepted as art by those who have given this subject serious thought.

The quality of design, of pattern, of appropriate and harmonious arrangement, must be taken into account in any discussion touching the philosophy of art. The universal appreciation and enjoyment of design as revealed in rugs, in tapestries, and in a hundred other art forms, may only be accounted for upon the theory of the existence of a universal law of nature governing the judgment of man with reference to these things.

This law is found in nature just as certainly as is found the law of gravitation. The art of design when not literally transcribed from the beautiful forms presented by nature herself is found to rest upon some adaptation of this universal law of symmetry and harmony. With symmetrical forms in nature we become familiar even in our childhood. Take for instance the symmetrical forms of leaves. The grace and symmetry of the leaf of the elm tree is well known, as is also the character of the oak leaf and its almost invariable symmetrical form. When a form that is not symmetrical appears, such, for instance, as that of the leaf of the sassafras tree—one of the three leaf forms borne by this tree being shaped like a mitten—we instantly recognize this exception to the almost universal rule and reject it as unsymmetrical and inharmonious. Illustrations of symmetry might be multiplied, because they are found in flower and animal forms everywhere. With harmony and colour we are made familiar by the passing seasons. Spring, summer, autumn, and winter are successive expressions of harmony.

How far this universal law of symmetry extends throughout nature and what influence it has upon the human mind in its appreciation of the beautiful in nature it would be difficult to estimate. It is sufficient for our purpose to know that it is universal and far reaching in its application and influence. It is interesting in this connection to note that J. Henri Fabre, the eminent French naturalist, makes reference to this law in describing the uniformity with which certain bees act, their actions seeming to be governed by a mysterious law. In his book on "Bramble Bees and Others" Fabre says: "The first time that I prepared one of these horizontal tubes [for bramble bees] open at both ends, I was greatly struck by what happened. The series consisted of ten cocoons. It was divided into two equal batches. The five on the left went out on the left, the five on the right went out on the right, reversing, when necessary, their original direction in the cell. It was very remarkable from

J. Henri Fabre

the point of view of symmetry; moreover, it was a very unlikely arrangement among the total number of possible arrangements, as mathematics will show us." Fabre elucidates this fact by mathematical calculation proving that there had been a spontaneous decision, one half in favor of the exit on the left, one half in favor of that on the right, when the tube was horizontal and gravity ceased to interfere.

This law of harmony has been recognized and to some extent defined by early philosophers and writers as well as by those of recent date.

It was recognized and referred to by Plato, who Plato said that the world offers the material in graceful and beautiful forms; or again that there is no difficulty in seeing that grace or the absence of grace is an effect of good or bad rhythm . . . that beauty of style and harmony and grace and good rhythm depend on simplicity. He also refers to art as representing proportion, harmony, or unity among the parts. His thought is that there is an absolute principle of beauty which reveals itself in natural objects. Aristotle expressed the opinion that the Aristotle essential qualities of beauty are order and symmetry. Knight refers to the appreciation of sym- Knight metry and proportion on the part of the Greek people and he concludes that the knowledge of this

Kant

same law of symmetry and its appreciation was doubtless the basis of Greek art. Kant in his philosophy refers to this same law of symmetry, grace, and beauty in nature. He says: "The beautiful forms displayed in the organic world all plead eloquently on the side of the realism of the aesthetic finality of nature in support of the plausible assumption that beneath the production of the beautiful there must lie a preconceived idea in the producing cause—that is to say, an end acting in the interest of our imagination. Flowers, blossoms, even the shapes of plants as a whole, the elegance of animal formations of all kinds, unnecessary for the discharge of any function on their part, but chosen as it were with an eye to our taste; and, beyond all else, the variety and harmony in the array of colours (in the pheasant, in crustacea, in insects, down even to the meanest flowers) so pleasing and charming to the eye, but which, inasmuch as they touch the bare surface and do not even here in any way affect the structure of these creatures—a matter which might have a necessary bearing on their internal ends-seem to be planned entirely with a view to outward appearance: all these lend great weight to the mode of explanation which assumes actual ends of nature Blackie in favor of our aesthetic judgment." John Stuart

Blackie refers to qualities in nature which create spontaneously in the mind a degree of pleasure because of their symmetry and beauty. He says: "There must be, therefore, in nature and in the constitution of things certain qualities which, being superinduced upon the useful, or mere fitness to achieve a practical end, create in the mind the pleasant sensations which arise spontaneously on the perception of a beautiful object."

It would seem, therefore, that nature has furnished those forms and colours which are symmetrical and harmonious, and that familiarity with these has created in man, in varying degrees, a love for the beautiful and an appreciation of the symmetrical and orderly. This law of symmetry and proportion not only appeals to our own consciousness but has become a part of our daily life.

It frequently happens that the repetition of beautiful forms results in what comes to be recognized as a conventional or national expression of art. This is especially true of Chinese and Japanese art. Conventional forms adopted by one generation of Chinese or Japanese artists were often handed down to succeeding generations of artists. Not only was this true, but the repetition of these conventional forms, generation after generation, resulted in the adoption of certain arbitrary rules

i-ichi Taki

governing the composition and construction of their works of art. Sei-ichi Taki in his "Three Essays on Oriental Painting" noted eighteen rules for the painting of "mountain wrinkles." Among these rules the following may be mentioned: "Wrinkled like eddying water." "Wrinkled like a horse's tooth." "Wrinkled like bullock's hair." "Wrinkled like the veins of a lotus leaf."

Notwithstanding these conventions, the fundamental or underlying qualities in Chinese and Japanese art do not differ from those characterizing works by artists of other nations. There was the same reliance upon nature and insistence upon selection and the expression of essential character. For instance, Kuo Hsi, himself a landscape painter, in his work on art criticism, "Noble Features of the Forest and Stream," wrote as follows: "Observe widely and comprehensively." And again: "Take in the essentials of a scene and discard the trivialities."

uo Hsi

ıfcadio 'ea<mark>rn</mark> With Chinese and Japanese artists it was always a question of discriminating selection. Lafcadio Hearn, a keen observer and a charming writer upon Japanese life and art, referred with unusual penetration to the importance of selection when he wrote: "The artist looked for dominant laws of contrast and colour, for the general character of nature's combinations, for the order of the beautiful. He drew actualities but not repellent or meaningless actualities, proving his rank even more by his refusal than by his choice of subjects." It will be seen from these expressions that Chinese and Japanese art was in fact based upon an intimate and thorough knowledge of nature, influenced by certain conventions which were clearly defined and understood.

John La Farge, the American artist who was a La Farge profound student of oriental art, suggests this undefined law of harmony in the universe when he says: "I might acknowledge that I have far within me a belief that art is the love of certain balanced proportions and relations which the mind likes to discover and to bring out in what it deals with, be it thought, or the action of man, or the influences of nature, or the material things in which the necessity makes it to work. I should then expand this idea until it stretched from the patterns of earliest pottery to the harmony of the lines of Homer. Then I should say that in our plastic arts the relations of lines and spaces are, in my belief, the first and earliest desires. And again, I should have to say that, in my unexpressed faith, these needs are as needs of the soul and echoes of the laws of the universe, seen and unseen, reflections of the universal mathematics, cadences of the ancient music of the spheres."

"For I am forced to believe that there are laws for our eyes as well as for our ears, and that when, if ever, these shall have been deciphered, as has been the good fortune with music, then shall we find that all best artists have carefully preserved their instinctive obedience to these, and have all cared together for this before all."

"For the arrangements of line and balances of spaces which meet these underlying needs are indeed the points through which we recognize the answer to our natural love and sensitiveness for order, and through this answer, we feel, clearly or obscurely, the difference between what we call great men and what we call the average, whatever the personal charm may be."



Conclusion

Tr may seem ruthless to destroy the old concep-L tion which attributed to the works of the painter and sculptor a place superior to or above the works of men in the field of science or in other spheres of activity, but this, I think, is rapidly being done. The idea that man is capable of adding anything to or improving upon the supreme qualities of beauty as these exist in nature is disappearing. The spirit of a scientific age is dispelling the old conception of art. Men now realize in art as in science that the quality of truth is the sole object to be sought.

Lord James Bryce, the eminent English statesman and author, recently called attention to the James Bryce dominating influence of the scientific spirit as felt in the various activities of our time. He referred to the effect which the enormous increase in knowledge in the scientific world has had upon our intellectual life and upon the ideas, the habits and

Lord

ways of thought of mankind. He said that the scientific investigations during the past century and a half have occupied a larger proportion of the energetic intellects of the world than ever before. The results of these investigations have been more read than they ever were before, and by a widening circle. They have more affected men's minds and become part of our thinking-part of the mental furniture of educated men and women. Lord Bryce pointed out that through the everlasting searching after truth and the facts of nature "the methods and the spirit of science have undoubtedly affected such subjects as metaphysical and ethical philosophy, as economic science and history, as political theory, as oratory, as philology, as literature." And he added that for some reason (he would not call it inscrutable, because he said that everything is more or less discoverable by sufficient study and attention—everything in the human sphere at least) he believed that there did, in the Eighteenth Century, begin to come over the human mind a change, the results of which are seen in all these fields. The novelty of this method, Lord Bryce said, 'lies in the scrupulous care which we bestow upon phenomena, in the determination to examine the minutest details and to record exactly what we see, that and nothing more." Lord

Bryce had also expressed the thought that with all careful study we must strive to communicate an impression, which is much more difficult than merely to state facts. For example, he says, the historian's general impression of a people is no less an expression of truth and no less accurate than is the presentation of many minor facts. Lord Bryce here states a profound truth, namely, that the impression of the whole is of greater importance than the literal representation of detail. This truth applies to art. The elimination of trifling details but emphasizes the power and beauty of the whole.

I think it is this scientific spirit which has influenced modern art and which is very clearly exemplified in the history of the School of Impressionists. This school has exerted a powerful influence upon the art of painting of the present day. I know that the general opinion has been that the so-called Impressionist painters have departed from the representation of the truths of nature and that their paintings are not faithful representations of nature; but I believe the very reverse of this to be true. I think, in their search for the essential truth of nature, or the essential fact, that they have, in their very intensity of effort, departed from the representation of minute details and of

many forms, in order that they might the more fully and perfectly represent the less obvious and more subtle truth.

Take, for instance, the purpose which actuated Monet, probably the leader of this group of painters, in his effort to represent the very truth of nature by a few masses of vibrating colour. For example, his haycock series of pictures was but an effort to represent the most essential qualities of the subjects which he had chosen for his experiment. I recall very well the first painting by Monet which I had the opportunity to see, some thirty years ago, and the impression I received then remains fresh in my memory. It was not the pleasurable or childish sensation created by recognizing the forms of familiar objects, but rather the delight created by an impression of vibrating, sunlit atmosphere. This effect was the result of scientific research. Monet simply applied his power and his wealth of technical ability to reproduce another kind of truth, the truth of nature as broadly represented by beautiful colours in relation to each other. I mention Monet in this connection because he seems to represent, in an important sense, the influence of a scientific age upon the art of the painter.

This view of Claude Monet's art and the art of

the so-called Impressionists is the very opposite of that entertained by many writers who have attributed to these painters careless rather than scientific methods.

If the principles laid down in this work are true, they become of vital importance. We will not think less of art, but we will be inspired by a new devotion to nature and the great laws which govern her. We will seek more diligently after the subtle harmonies and beauties in nature, those qualities which have been discovered by the great masters and translated with measurable success. We will go to nature with more intelligence and devotion, that we may there enjoy these things for ourselves at the source of all beauty. The student may lay aside all preconceived notions with reference to inspiration and creation, and address himself to his task as would any other workman. The result should be a more profound appreciation of all beauty and more joy in a world too often made commonplace by man.



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